

MAGNA CARTA OF WOMEN

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The Women of Malolos Bulacan, Gabriela Silang, Gregoria de Jesus, and The Katipuneras, these remarkable women showed and proven that equality, empowerment, and social impact know no boundaries.

One of the issues raised in the “Critical Content in Araling Panlipunan” seminar that I attended years back in Pampanga is the lack of awareness of local history and current events of the Filipino students. While there were no studies and research presented to support the claim, the mentioned concern must be seriously addressed. Another problem discussed is the inequality of the people in terms of gender. The speaker professed that we are still living in a capitalist and patriarchal world.

The Magna Carta of Women (MCW) or Republic Act 9710 is a comprehensive women's human rights law that seeks to eliminate discrimination through the recognition, protection, fulfillment, and promotion of the rights of Filipino women, especially those belonging to the marginalized sectors of the society. It conveys a framework of rights for women based directly on international law.

The MCW establishes the Philippine government’s pledge of commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women's (CEDAW) Committee in its 36th Session in 2006 and to the UN Human Rights Council on its first Universal Periodic Review in 2009. *It is the local translation of the provisions of the CEDAW*, particularly in defining gender discrimination, state obligations, substantive equality, and temporary special measures. It also recognizes human rights guaranteed by the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Salient features of the law include: (a) increasing the number of women in third-level positions in government to achieve a fifty-fifty (50-50) gender balance; (b) leave benefits of two (2) months with full pay based on gross monthly compensation for women employees who undergo surgery caused by gynecological disorders; (c) non-discrimination in employment in the field of military, police and other similar services; (d) provision for equal access and elimination of discrimination in education, scholarships, and training; (e) non-discriminatory and non-derogatory portrayal of women in media and film to raise the consciousness of the general public in recognizing the dignity of women and the role and contribution of women in family, community, and the society through the strategic use of mass media; (f) equal status is given to men and women on the titling of the land and issuance of stewardship contracts and patents.

In addition to guaranteeing substantive rights, the MCW establishes the responsibility of the government to take action in order to end discrimination against women. It provides that the Philippine government must "ensure the substantive equality of men and women" and mandates the State to take steps to review, amend or repeal existing laws that are discriminatory towards women.

The government, in its entirety, shall fulfill these duties through the development and implementation of laws, policies, regulatory instruments, administrative guidelines, and other appropriate measures. It shall also establish mechanisms to promote the coherent and integrated implementation of the MCW and other related laws and policies to effectively stop discrimination against Filipino women.

The MCW also mandates the planning, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation of gender and development; and creating and/or strengthening of gender and development focal points.

The laws, alongside several feminist movements around the world, continuously fight for gender equality. From the rights to vote, suffrage, "rape culture", and equal pay, fighting against gender discrimination has developed and progressed. Many will say that we are dealing with the same level of misogyny, the same gender stereotypes, and exploitation as the women of the '70s and '80s. We need to deepen and broaden people's understanding of what gender equality is. For as long as there is violence against women, there is no equality.

It is in contrast to the many studies claiming that the Philippines is a bastion of gender equality. The Philippines frequently makes it to the top ten in gender equality studies, the best in Asia, ahead of even the UK, and along with Scandinavian countries.

I would like to believe in the second reality but let us make that reality a "practiced" one.

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